

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 215363

EXDIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT NICOSIA 2545 ACTION SECSTATE DTD 26 AUG

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S E C R E T NICOSIA 2545

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FOR S/S AND NEA ONLY FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR LE

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH SARKIS

REF: NICOSIA 2491

1. WE CALLED ON SARKIS AT HIS HOME IN EAST BEIRUT ON
AUGUST 22. HERE HE IS ISOLATED WITH NO PALESTINIAN OR
MOSLEM CONTACTS. WHEN HE WANTS TO VISIT CHRISTIAN LEADERS
HE GENERALLY GOES TO THEM, NOT THEY TO HIM. HIS HOME IS
ON A HILL, IS EXPOSED TO OCCASIONAL FIRE, AND HE CAN SEE
BEFORE HIS EYES THE SLOW DESTRUCTION OF THE CAPITAL CITY

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OF THE COUNTRY OF WHICH HE WILL BECOME PRESIDENT ON

SEPTEMBER 23.

2. SARKIS IS A NORMALLY RETICENT MAN WHO MUST NOW BE VERY CAREFUL TO SAY NOTHING OFFENSIVE TO OTHER PERSONALITIES. HE EXPRESSES NO DOUBT THAT HE WILL BECOME PRESIDENT ON SCHEDULE BUT IS AWARE THAT HIS SUCCESS AS PRESIDENT DEPENDS ON MAINTAINING, AT A MINIMUM, THE TOLERATION OF THE MAJOR FACTIONS. SARKIS BELIEVES, AND OTHERS CONFIRM, THAT HE IS PRESENTLY ACCEPTABLE TO ALL PARTIES AS A POTENTIAL MEDIATOR AND COULD, HOPEFULLY, LEAD LEBANON BACK TO NATIONAL UNITY.

3. THE PRESIDENT-ELECT STRESSED TO US THAT BEFORE LEBANON CAN COPE WITH ITS OWN PROBLEMS THE PALESTINIANS AND THE SYRIANS MUST SETTLE THEIRS. THE CURRENT HOLDUP IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DAMASCUS AGREEMENT AND, SUBSEQUENTLY, OF THE CAIRO ACCORD, IS THE PROBLEM OF WHO REPRESENTS LEBANON IN THE TRIPARTITE COMMISSION WHICH IS TO BE ESTABLISHED. SPECIFICALLY, LEBANESE LEADERS DO NOT AGREE AS TO WHETHER JUMBLATT SHOULD BE INCLUDED. (COMMENT: IT REDUCES THE PROBLEM ONCE AGAIN TO AN INTRA-LEBANESE DISPUTE, BUT NEITHER SARKIS NOR OTHER LEADERS SEEM TO PERCEIVE THE IRONY THAT A STRICTLY LEBANESE DISPUTE IS IMPEDING SETTLEMENT OF THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE.)

4. WITH RESPECT TO THE SYRIAN ROLE, SARKIS SAID THAT HE DOES NOT KNOW WHY THE SYRIANS CHOSE TO INTERVENE. IF THEIR GOAL IS TO PREVENT A PALESTINIAN/LEFTIST STATE FROM EMERGING IN ALL OR PART OF LEBANON, THEY HAVE NOT YET SUCCEEDED. THUS, THE SYRIAN INTERVENTION WILL CONTINUE. (COMMENT: THE DEPARTMENT WILL NOTE THAT SARKIS IS NOT CONFIDENT ABOUT THE PREMISE UNDERLYING THE CONCLUSION THAT SYRIA WILL STAY THE COURSE.)

5. REGARDING THE PALESTINIANS, SARKIS SAID SIMPLY THAT IF THEY WANT TO BE A FACTOR IN LEBANESE THIS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTABLE TO THE CHRISTIANS. THUS, THE FIGHTING WOULD GO ON.

6. SARKIS HAD NO COMMENT ON LEBANESE MOSLEM LEADERS OTHER
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THAN JUMBLATT, WHO, HE SAID, FOLLOWS THE PALESTINIANS' LEAD. AS WE HAVE NOTED, HE HAS NO CONTACTS WITH MOSLEM LEADERS.

7. NOR HAS SARKIS HAD ANY CONTACT WITH THE SOVIETS WHOSE MOTIVES, SAYD SARKIS, HE DOES NOT UNDERSTAND.

8. SARKIS ASKED WHY THE USG DOES NOT DO "SOMETHING" TO

CREATE A POLITICAL SOLUTION? HE ASKED WHETHER THE US
AND THE SOVIET UNION MIGHT AGREE TO IMPOSE A SOLUTION, THE
SOVIETS WITHDRAWING SUPPORT FROM THE PALESTINIANS AND LEFT-
WING, WHILE THE USG EXERCISES INFLUENCE ON SYRIA AND
ISRAEL. SARKIS SAID HE REALIZED THAT THE USG WOULD NOT
SOON ATTEMPT AN OVERALL MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT, ALTHOUGH
SUCH A STEP WOULD RELIEVE PALESTINIAN PRESSURE ON LEBANON.
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